



**BabyRead Columns  
In  
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**2019**

**2019 Journal Column  
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## Pre-literacy skills

When children get to school, they will be taught how to read. To learn how to read, there are many skills children need to learn that their parents and other adults in their life can help them with. Below are some:

**Rhyme:** Learning to recognize the sounds that letters make before I can read. Singing or reading aloud nursery rhymes is a great way to help babies and toddlers learn to hear how different words sound. Like the difference between “sun” and “fun” and “back” and “tack.”



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**Looking at books:** Children need to be interested in words and books to learn to read. Reading to children every day will encourage this

interest. Almost all children love being read to. And, this is an emotionally bonding experience between the child and the reader.

**Track:** Children need to be able to follow objects with their eyes to read. This takes paying attention and focus. These skills are critical to learning just about anything, including how to read. These skills can be learned and cultivated as you read to your child.

**Talk:** Children need an extensive vocabulary to understand what they read. Books contains millions of words. Many of these words are not found in daily conversation. Read a variety of books to your pre-schooler.

Talk to your child about the world around him/her to give him/her words for what your child sees and hears. Describe the lasagna you are making for dinner. Give him the names of different vegetables and fruits in the supermarket. Talk to her about the colors of the clothing your baby is wearing. It is endless.

**Do puzzles:** Children need to be able to differentiate size, shapes, lines and directions to learn how to read.

**Build:** Children need to use their fingers and hands independently to hold books and turn pages. They need to learn how to turn the pages of a book, from front to the end.

Most of all, children need someone to read to them every day before they go to school in order to make it easier to learn how to read in school. (This list is taken and expanded from bookoola.com.)

The best advice for parents is to engage with your children. The best way to teach them language is to talk with them, listen to them, read to them, play with them, use different vocabulary, point out things, tell them stories and have them tell you stories. Being a parent takes lots of time. Babies and toddlers don't need expensive toys to learn or be happy. They need the love and attention of caring adults.

**BABYREAD'S GOAL** is to read with moms/caregivers and their children from birth to two years when the brain grows the most. We read (free) twice a month in public libraries and schools. We need volunteer readers. To help, contact our director, Caren von Hippel, Ph.D., at [babyread@charter.net](mailto:babyread@charter.net) or (864) 944-7881 or go to our website, [babyread.org](http://babyread.org).

## Meet a BabyRead family

BabyRead's poster showing photos of babies and toddlers engaged in books at the 2018 K-4 screening caught Casey's eye.

Although she was there with her son, Colton, it was thoughts of her very determined 10-month old, Caroline, that made her stop and talk with the volun-



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teer at the BabyRead table. Casey's parents had instilled a strong respect for education in her from an early age, and her love of school led her to a love of reading. Colton, 3, would sit and listen as Casey read to him, but Caroline was restless during reading time, preferring to get down on the floor and either play or move around.

Casey hoped that engaging Caroline more with books would help her learn to love being read to.

It has worked. After meeting with family reader Cathy for the past 10 months, Caroline is very engaged with books. Both she and Colton love coming to the Walhalla Public Library every two weeks to spend time with their mom and Cathy.

Cathy says how they spend their hour together depends on whether Colton is joining them or not. There are days when they meet while he is at nursery school, but due to Casey's work schedule, he often comes along. If he is there while Cathy reads with Caroline, Casey engages Colton and vice versa.

Cathy also takes advantage of the puppet theater, puzzles, train set and other educational toys in the area to aid in language development skills with the children and to teach them songs and nursery rhymes.

At home, while Colton has a bedtime reading routine, Casey reads to Caroline at random times throughout the day, especially when she and Caroline are alone while Colton is at nursery school. Caroline also "reads" to herself, choosing a book to look at while sitting on her own little beanbag couch. If Colton is home, he often joins her and they look and point at the pictures together, having a "conversation" about them.

Casey has noticed that the most recent book Caroline has received at her BabyRead session is usually the favorite of the moment.

Casey teaches college skills to freshmen at the Anderson campus of Tri-County Technical College. Amazingly, she completed her M.A. in counseling just weeks before Caroline was born. Dad, Joe, was also influenced by Casey's parents' emphasis on education and received a degree in mechatronics. He works at Sealed Air, keeping all the machines in good working order.

Casey sums it all up: "BabyRead has been a wonderful experience for both me and my children."

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## *Why play is important for children*

We need readers!

BabyRead is a group of volunteers who read with moms/caregivers of children ages birth to 2 years. We read twice each month in public town and school libraries. This free program provides a free book and snack to the mom/caregiver at each meeting.

To learn more, contact director Caren von Hippel, Ph.D., at [babyread@charter.net](mailto:babyread@charter.net) or (864) 944-7881 or visit our website, [www.babyread.org](http://www.babyread.org).



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“Play is behavior that looks as if it has no purpose,” National Institutes of Health psychologist Dr. Stephen Suomi said.

“It looks like fun, but it actually prepares kids for a complex social world.”

Research shows that active, creative play benefits just about every aspect of child development.

“If youngsters lack playtime,” said Dr. Roberta Golinkoff, an infant language expert at the University of Delaware, “social skills will likely suffer. You lack the ability to inhibit impulses, to switch tasks easily and to play on your own. Play helps young children master their emotions and make their own decisions. It also teaches about flexibility, motivation and confidence.”

“Kids don’t need expensive toys to get a lot out of playtime. Parents are children’s most enriching plaything,” Golinkoff said.

Playing and talking to babies is vital to their language development. Golinkoff said that kids who talk with their parents tend to acquire a vocabulary that will later help them in school. Let kids guide the conversation. When you take over the conversation, you may shut it down.

Unstructured, creative physical play often lets children burn calories and develop all kinds of strengths, such as learning how the world works. In free play, children choose the games, make the rules, learn to negotiate and release stress.

Free play often involves fantasy. If children want to learn about being a fireman, they can imagine and act out what a fireman does. And if something scary happens, free play can help defuse emotions by working them out.

With video screens beckoning children indoors, free, creative play is curtailed. Look at all of the language development that is occurring when you are playing with your baby or toddler, or he/she is playing by himself/herself. You play with your baby just by being responsive to what she/he says or does. Understand “serve and return” as I described in an earlier column.

Children benefit from just playing on their own. One BabyRead family reported that their 14-month-old sat and “read” a book by talking about it with his 7-year-old sister. They had an extended conversation about the book, and used their imaginations to conjure up other characters not in the story.

“Sports are a kind of play,” Golinkoff said, “but it is not the kids calling the shots.” And with babies and toddlers, we are not talking about sports — the key is that in free play, kids are making the decisions, Golinkoff said. You can’t learn to make decisions if you are always told what to do.”

(All quotes from National Institutes of Health, 2019.)

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## *How to raise a reader*

### **READ EARLY**

“You may think you’re off the hook with books until your baby is at least vertical, but not so. Even newborns benefit from the experience of hearing stories.

### **READ ALOUD, EVERY DAY**

“You can read anything to a newborn: a cookbook, a novel, a cartoon or magazine. The content doesn’t matter. What does matter is the sound of your voice, the cadence of the text and the words themselves. Research has shown that the number of words an infant is exposed to has a direct impact on language development and literacy. But here’s the catch: The language has to be live, in person and directed at the child. Turning on a TV or a story on an iPad doesn’t count ... Just enjoy yourself!”



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### **USE YOUR SENSES**

“Babies who are read to are learning that reading is fun and can involve all of the senses: the feel of the pages ... the visuals of the illustrations and the sounds of their parents’ voice ... Try textured books — they are good for your child’s tactile experiences.”

### **MAKE EYE CONTACT**

Make eye contact but don’t look for a particular reaction. It may seem that babies are not listening, but they are absorbing the experience. The patterns, routines and attentive habits that are set

now will last a lifetime. If you get a response, respond to what your child does. This is called “serve and return,” which I discussed in an earlier column. Your baby kicks his feet and you grab his toes and say “kick, kick, you are learning to be strong.” Your baby will probably respond and then so should you. These are very early “conversations.”

### **GET YOUR BABY TALKING**

“Many babies may start making sounds in response to your words. This is why so many books for babies contain nonsense words or animal sounds — they’re easier to mime. Try it: If your child makes a noise, respond. It may make no sense to you, but it is communication.

### **TODDLERS**

“It is hard to overestimate how important reading is to a toddler’s intellectual, social and emotional development. When you read with toddlers, they take it all in — vocabulary and language structure, number and math concepts, colors, shapes, animals, opposites, manners and all kinds of information about how the world works.”

(Quotes from “How to Raise a Reader,” New York Times, March 22, 2019)

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## *How to raise a reader:* *Part 2*

### **TODDLERS:**

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all kinds of information about how the world works. What’s more, when you read books aloud, your toddler connects books with the familiar, beloved sound of your voice — and the physical closeness that reading together brings. You are helping build a positive association with books that will last a lifetime.”

### **READ THROUGHOUT THE DAY:**

“Even if it is once, at bedtime and at or before breakfast, when you take a break, or when your toddler gets cranky. Nightly bedtime reading is a familiar routine for toddlers — what better way to get your little ball of energy to relax before bed? ... Reading to your toddler is a way to get them to slow down and focus. Sit close and enjoy these moments of connection.”

### **RESPECT YOUR CHILD’S PREFERENCES:**

“Your child is already surprising you with independent tastes and opinions. Just as one child does not like kale salad or mustard, your child may not like the

same books you did as a child. Encourage children to express what they like about their books and find more books like these.”

### **IF YOU WANT TO RAISE A READER, BE A READER:**

“Children model their parents’ behavior. If your child sees you reading a book or a newspaper, this says reading is valued. Putting away your cell phone and reading a story to your child shows your child that you think that reading is important. Try to turn your cell phone off (unless there is an emergency) and certainly keep it out of sight when you are reading with your toddler (or baby). Children think that cell phones are toys and very valuable toys because many parents spend so much time on them.”

### **CHOOSE DIVERSE BOOKS:**

“All children need to see themselves reflected in the picture books around them. If your child belongs to a racial or ethnic minority, seek out books that feature children who look similar to them in a variety of roles. In addition, exposing children to diversity in books will prepare them for life in a diverse world.”

*Quotes from “How to Raise a Reader,”  
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## *A BabyRead family: Kara, Jacob and Dad*

Jacob, four months shy of his 3rd birthday, is quite a talker and is quick to tell you how much he loves his books and “stawbewees.”

Kara attributes his love of books in great part to their participation in BabyRead.

Kara first learned about BabyRead at the 2018 K4 screening, which she was attending for her older son, Daniel. She immediately signed up, thinking it would be a great opportunity for her and Jacob to spend time together outside of home and with another adult who loves books as much as she does. (Kara enjoys reading mysteries “in her spare time” — a rare commodity for a mother of two young children!)

Both BabyRead and family reader Nancy have more than fulfilled Kara’s expectations. She and Jacob travel from their home in Fair Play every two weeks to meet with Nancy at the Seneca Public Library.

In the year they have been reading with Nancy, Jacob’s attention span and love of books has grown significantly. Nancy often brings a ball or bubbles to their session, but of late Jacob shows a preference for books over other entertainments. Both at home and at the library, he selects a book and tells his mom or Nancy, “Let’s read.”

He loves selecting a book to take home with him from BabyRead. The most current chosen books often end up as favorites over the next couple of weeks.

Jacob “reads” in the car while his mom is driving. Kara says Jacob talks about the trip to the library throughout the week after their reading session.

Jacob points out letters in the books they read and tells her what they are. While at lunch, Jacob demonstrated his mastery of the alphabet by singing the “Alphabet Song.” When he finished, Nancy said, “That was beautiful.” Jacob responded with a formal bow from the waist and said, “Thank you!”

Five year-old brother Daniel is also a great lover of books. His K4 class has books and expects that each student read 100 books by the end of the school term. Daniel surpassed 200 books this spring and keeps reading. Daniel reads to Jacob each night, giving Mom a little break and providing a great bonding time for the brothers. Dad works full-time and is proud that both his sons love books and reading.

— *Written by Janice Garcia,  
BabyRead volunteer*

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